Meeting between

The Prime Minister, Mr. Menachem Begin
and delegation from
Armed Services Committee of the US House of Representatives

November 10, 1977
Prime Minister's Office, Jerusalem

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H.E. MR. M. BEGIN: Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: may I welcome you to Israel, to Jerusalem, and to this office. I assume you have come at a propitious time because yesterday President Sadat of Egypt made a statement to the effect that he is prepared to come to Jerusalem, to the Knesseth. I assume that you will meet him tomorrow and may I ask you, Mr. Chairman, to give my message to President Sadat to the effect that I welcome his statement and if he decides to come to Jerusalem, I would like to have some notice in adance, of a day. We shall receive him with all the honors due to a president. I will go out myself to Lydda Airport to receive him and I shall bring him to Jerusalem and we shall be very happy to start talks, to establish peace in the Middle East.

On the other hand, I am prepared to come any day to Cairo for the very same purpose. As I said when I took office, I am ready to go to any place, any time, to see President Sadat and also President Assad and the negotiations for peace treaty can take place in our various capitals, Cairo, Damascus, Jerusalem or a neutral place like Geneva. And I only hope that when I come to Cairo he will also receive me hospitably and give me a chance to have a glimpse at the Pyramids which our forefathers helped to construct, for which we don't ask any compensation. I'll be very grateful. And let us start talking peace. That is my message.

Secondly, the President said that when he comes to Geneva, he will ask for Israel's total withdrawal to the lines of 4th of June 1967 and for the formation of what he calls a "Palestinian State" in Judea, Samaria and in the Gaza Strip, which shall be linked with a corridor.

It is my duty to say that Israel cannot accept those demands, because they would mean a mortal danger to the State of Israel, that mortal danger about which Prof. Brezezinski spoke about a a few weeks ago on Canadian television. Prof. Brezezinski said that if Israel should face mortal danger, the United States will rush to her rescue. I wrote to the President, President Carter, that we find in this statement good_will. The question is why should there be mortal danger to Israel? It has loomed over us for too long. Danger is a different story. Everybody now lives in a certain danger in every country, whether small or large. But mortal danger is a completely different term and we don't want to see again Israel being in mortal danger.

We don't want American soldiers to fight our battles. We don't want any soldiers of any country to die for us. We can sustain our independence. And, therefore, we must be very careful to create conditions in which there is not mortal danger to Israel. And, therefore, we cannot accept his demand.

However, President Sadat is entitled to state his position in Geneva at the Peace Conference. Here we have an opportunity to make clear what is the real meaning of the word "pre-condition".

If President Sadat should say to us: if you want me to be in Geneva, accept in advance my demand for that total withdrawal and the Palestinian State, etc. That would be a precondition. Then we wouldn't accept it at all. Or, to give another example on our side and with the same sense of justice. For instance, we have our position on Jerusalem. This city is undivided, indivisible, and it will stay the capital of our country. We shall state that position when we come to Geneva. But if we had asked President Sadat to accept that position of Israel in advance for us as a condition to go to Geneva, that would mean a pre-condition on our side and we don't ask it. No side should have pre-conditions. Every side will have its position and those positions will be brought to the Peace Conference table and discussed. But none of the sides should say, accept or adopt in advance any position so that I should come to Geneva. Otherwise, I won't come.

So now, everybody will understand what is the real meaning of the word "pre-condition", and, of course, if President Sadat prefers to come to Geneva, welcome! As you know, Ladies and Gentlemen, it was our suggestion to go to Geneva when I was in Washington and met the President, the Secretary of State and you as well and your colleagues in the Senate and the House of Representatives and we want to have the Geneva Conference reconvened.

Thank you for your attention. Now, please, ask me any questions and I will do my best.